

# The Lady and the Juggler

## *Mary East and West*

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*This article honors Ilene H. Forsyth,  
mentor and pathbreaker.*

During the autumn of 2018, the museum at Dumbarton Oaks hosted an exhibition about a medieval beneficial tale and its multifaceted modernist revival.<sup>1</sup> Known as *The Jongleur of Notre Dame* or *Our Lady's Tumbler*, it tells of a juggler-turned-monk who, scorned by his prayer-literate brethren, found his own miracle of beatitude by tumbling ardently before a statue of Mary in the solitude of the crypt.<sup>2</sup> Both the exhibition and Jan Ziolkowski's many recent publications have made clear the enduring appeal of the Juggler, who has been interpreted repeatedly since the earliest known depiction of him in a small miniature introduced as an oddly sited afterthought at the bottom of folio 127r in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arsenal 3516, of 1268, which preserves the best surviving variant of the tale's thirteenth-century French text (fig. 1). The head-over-heels posture of its Juggler conjoins abasement and exaltation, evoking the sentiments of King David as he danced before the Ark of the Covenant to the opprobrium of his wife, Michal.<sup>3</sup> The alignment

of the Juggler's tumble with David's dance—or, more particularly, with David's invocation of deep humility to explain it—is generally believed to have belonged to the original tale, and to have been a germinal inspiration for it. The analogy has helped solidify the story's association with the Cistercian Order and its exaltation of extreme humility, as expressed in St. Bernard's metaphor of the monk as a “jongleur of God.”<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, the figure to whom the juggler-monk offers his performance has been assumed to need no explanation. Yet as Johann-Christian Klamt notes, if the lowly tumbler is to be elevated to the level of a royal prophet, able to quell his abbot's opprobrium, Mary must be the one who effects this transformation.<sup>5</sup> And as Ziolkowski has shown, the Mary of the tale is far from simple, compounding access to the most high with concern for the most menial, and blending elements of Byzantine as well as Latin Mariolatry, such as the textile relic of the Virgin's veil.<sup>6</sup> Thus, he raises the questions of who was the transformative Mary of the Juggler's tale, and how did she draw on the persuasive powers of Mary both East and West? The association of

1 *Juggling in the Middle Ages*, 16 October 2018–3 March 2019; J. M. Ziolkowski, *The Juggler of Notre Dame and the Medievalizing of Modernity*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 2018).

2 A. France, *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame: Text calligraphié, enluminé et historié par Malatesta* (Paris, 1906); A. France, *The Juggler of Our Lady: Written Out, Illuminated, and Historiated by Malatesta*, trans. J. M. Ziolkowski (Washington, DC, 2018).

3 Ziolkowski, *Juggler of Notre Dame*, 1:40 and passim; R. Fulton Brown, *Mary and the Art of Prayer: The Hours of the Virgin in Medieval Christian Life and Thought* (New York, 2018), 371–79; J.-C. Klamt,

“‘Le tumbear de Notre-Dame’: Gaukler in Demut,” *ZKunstg* 60.3 (1997): 289–307; and A. Heimann, “A Twelfth-Century Manuscript from Winchcombe and Its Illustrations: Dublin, Trinity College MS. 53,” *JWarb* (1965): 86–109, at 94–109.

4 Ziolkowski, *Juggler of Notre Dame*, 96, 133.

5 Klamt, “‘Le tumbear de Notre-Dame,’” 295.

6 Ziolkowski, *Juggler of Notre Dame*, 75–78.

Fig. 1.  
Paris, Bibliothèque  
nationale de France,  
Arsenal 3516,  
fol. 127r. Courtesy  
of the Bibliothèque  
nationale de France.



the Ark of the Covenant with Mary was deeply rooted in Greek as well as Latin Christendom, and a Byzantine miniature roughly contemporary with the Juggler's story also plays upon that bond in an image of David's dance (fig. 2).<sup>7</sup> Preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, suppl. gr. 1335, a New Testament and psalter, the image faces the canonical musician David

across an open bifolium surely intended to preface the psalter. Striking in this case is not the dancer but the one for whom he performs. It, too, is Mary, but Mary in an otherwise unique configuration, for her face peers out from a window within the ox-drawn Ark, readily recognizable from depictions in the Octateuch. The bifolium was probably designed to show David as belonging to both the Old and the New Testament. It may have been set aside for being too unusual, as it received no text, but in the end it was bound into the manuscript after all, leaving no doubt that Mary was aligned with the Ark in about 1200 in Byzantium as in the West. But it also shows that the Eastern and Western modes of imagining the analogy could diverge

7 A. W. Carr, *Byzantine Illumination, 1150–1250: The Study of a Provincial Tradition* (Chicago and London, 1987), 282, fiche 2B6, where it is identified as David watching Abishag, as it is also in *Byzance et la France médiévale: Manuscrits à peintures du II<sup>e</sup> au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1958), 29–30, no. 46. But Heiman, "Twelfth-Century Manuscript from Winchcombe," 98, n. 34, is surely right that it shows David dancing before the Ark.





Fig. 2.  
Paris, Bibliothèque  
nationale de France,  
suppl. gr. 1335,  
fol. 259r. Courtesy  
of the Bibliothèque  
nationale de France.

sharply. That Mary could nonetheless merge the two to forge the heroine of the Juggler's story invites attention to her from East and West.

Mary was an expansive figure already in the early Middle Ages, her story having been transmitted across Asia by migrant Christian communities. She was upheld in Islam, too, as the virgin mother of the prophet Isa, or Jesus, receiving fuller attention in the Koran than in the Bible.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, when "East and

West" arise in connection with the "Our Lady" of the tale, the reference is to the East and West of the medieval Christian world, where Mary was a site of endless interchange between the Greek-speaking empire of Byzantium and the Latin West. The Juggler's story belongs to a kind of beneficial miracle tale that had emerged in the early Christian East;<sup>9</sup> the French version

8 R. George-Tvrtković, *Christians, Muslims, and Mary: A History* (New York, 2018), 35–56, esp. 39; Y. Y. Haddad and J. I. Smith, "The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary," *MW* 79.3–4 (1989): 161–87.

9 See, e.g., J. Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow (Pratum Spirituale)*, trans. J. Wortley (Kalamazoo, MI, 1992), 38, no. 47; 39, no. 48; 47, no. 61; 56–57, no. 75; 144, no. 175; 149–50, no. 180. On the significance of Moschos's Marian tales in the earliest European recounting of Marian miracles, see G. Signori, *Maria zwischen Kathedrale, Kloster und Welt: Hagiographische und historiographische Annäherungen an eine hochmittelalterliche Wunderpredigt* (Sigmaringen, 1995), 59–60.





Fig. 3. Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore, triumphal arch, Adoration of the Magi. Photo courtesy of Nimatallah / Art Resource, NY.

even claims an origin in the *Vies des Pères*, compiled from the stories of the fourth-century desert fathers.<sup>10</sup> Yet the Mary who steps into the story, and perhaps most especially the form of the Juggler's devotion to her, is so particular to a time and locality with a distinctive place in our imagination that it seems worthwhile to explore how such a tale emerging in "the East" became such an evocative emblem of the medieval West.

Mary assumed consistency as an image, rather than just as a name, over the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>11</sup> Her earliest major urban church, Santa Maria Maggiore

in Rome, from the second quarter of the fifth century, was in the West. But it honors an ecumenical definition arrived at in Ephesus in the East and best known by the Greek term of Theotokos, or God bearer: it says that Mary bore not just the human man Jesus but also the incarnate God. Though addressing the nature of Christ, this definition also aroused interest in Mary, and major churches soon followed Santa Maria Maggiore in both Constantinople and Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> This is not, however, to say that there was a settled image of her, as exemplified by the scene of the Adoration of the Magi on the triumphal arch in Santa Maria Maggiore (fig. 3). There

10 J. M. Ziolkowski, "Juggling in the Middle Ages: The Reception of *Our Lady's Tumbler* and *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame*," *Studies in Medievalism* 15 (2006): 157–97, at 158.

11 On early images of Mary, see M. Vassilaki, ed., *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Athens, 2000), 252–75, including C. Barber, "Early Representations of the Mother of God," 253–61, with catalogue entries.

12 C. Mango, "Constantinople as Theotokoupolis," in *Mother of God*, 17–25; R. Avner, "The Initial Tradition of the Theotokos at the Kathisma: Earliest Celebrations and the Calendar," in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, ed. L. Brubaker and M. B. Cunningham (Farnham, 2011), 9–29.

the Magi are attended by two women, one in imperial and one in simple garb. No scholarly consensus exists as to which—or perhaps both—shows Mary.<sup>13</sup> Mary's image was still protean at this time. The so-called *Protevangelium* by Jesus's brother James had expanded upon her scant biography in the canonical Gospels, giving her doting parents; a rather ethereal conception; and a childhood, during which she was fed by angels in the Temple.<sup>14</sup> Stranger apocrypha told of miracles at her death, when Christ had assembled the apostles and descended from heaven to receive her soul, and reported her mysteriously empty tomb.<sup>15</sup> The great Akathistos Hymn, composed in fifth-century Byzantium, adorned her with cascades of epithets drawn from theology, nature, the Pentateuch, and the Book of Wisdom.<sup>16</sup> The visual repertoire that emerged from this plethora was widely varied, and it was only in the ensuing two centuries that an image of Mary was composed.

Constantinople, the imperial capital, played a major role as Mary was integrated into the canons of Church and State.<sup>17</sup> Garbed in purple, accompanied by an angelic bodyguard, and often enthroned, she took form as a regal queen of heaven. Lacking the ornamental regalia of earthly empresses, however, she remained

visually distinct, and though hailed recurrently as the bride unwed of God, she was never aligned conjugally with her son, and was rarely depicted without his infant figure in her arms. She formed more a female complement than a spousal consort to his male power.<sup>18</sup> In earthly politics, too, she stood above empire, and although powerful women brandished her greatness,<sup>19</sup> she was in no sense limited to their protection, but—as illustrated in coins—extended her power over the head of the empire, whether that head was male, female, or both.<sup>20</sup> The Church absorbed her apocrypha into its canons, and in the liturgy assigned her four feasts, two based on the Gospels and two—of her birth on 8 September and her death on 15 August—based on extracanonical texts. This would prove awkward in the West, which resisted giving liturgical legitimacy to apocrypha. Marian relics, exotic in their rarity given her empty tomb, were gathered in Constantinople to enhance its glory.<sup>21</sup> These were textile relics, above all

13 D. N. Angelova, *Sacred Founders: Women, Men, and Gods in the Discourse of Imperial Founding, Rome through Early Byzantium* (Berkeley, 2015), 247, with earlier bibliography, esp. N. A. Brodsky, *L'iconographie oubliée de l'arc éphésien de Sainte-Marie Majeure à Rome*, Bibliothèque de Byzantion 1 (Brussels, 1966), 58, 66; S. Spain, "'The Promised Blessing': The Iconography of the Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore," *ArtB* 61 (1979): 530–32. The simply clad Mary feels familiar; Mary in imperial garb does appear in early medieval Rome, and B. V. Pentcheva (*Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* [University Park, PA, 2006], 21–26) suggests that this imagery might have originated in Constantinople. To date, however, no Eastern example is known; the mosaic in the amphitheater of Dyrrachium (Durazzo), Albania, was within the see of Rome.

14 "The Protevangelium of James," in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 16, *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, and Revelations*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1870), 1–52.

15 S. J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, 2002), with earlier bibliography.

16 L. M. Peltomaa, "Epithets of the Theotokos in the Akathistos Hymn," in Brubaker and Cunningham, *Cult of the Mother of God*, 109–16; eadem, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*, *The Medieval Mediterranean* 35 (Leiden and Boston, 2001).

17 A. Cameron, "The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople: A City Finds Its Symbol," *JTS* 29 (1978): 79–108.

18 Angelova (*Sacred Founders*, 250–58) offers a particularly interesting examination of the relation of Mary to the figure of the empress, positing the complementarity of their power in their authority rather than in any conjugal role. Thus, Mary is parallel to Helena (236, 251), the empress-mother, and Pulcheria, the virgin ascetic (244), and not imperial spouses; her fertility is not parallel to that of the empress (257); and when shown enthroned and facing Christ, she holds his infant form in her lap in clear declaration that she is his mother, not the mother of his sons. Only Helena and Constantine are actually aligned with Mary and Christ as parallel couples (258). Mary's alignment with the empress is not as a spouse.

19 Esp. Pulcheria. See K. G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Domination in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), esp. 147–74; N. P. Constanas, "Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of Constantinople, the Theotokos, and the Loom of the Flesh," *JECrSt* 3 (1995): 169–94.

20 See, e.g., *DOC* 3:2, pl. XXXIV, 1b.1 (<https://www.doaks.org/resources/online-exhibits/byzantine-emperors-on-coins/the-macedonians-and-their-immediate-successors-867-1081/solidus-of-leo-vi-886-912>, consulted 3 August 2020); *ibid.*, pl. LVIII, 1 (<https://www.doaks.org/resources/online-exhibits/byzantine-emperors-on-coins/the-macedonians-and-their-immediate-successors-867-1081/nomisma-histamenon-of-zoe-and-theodora-1042>, consulted 3 August 2020); *ibid.*, pl. LXV, 3.10, same die as <https://www.doaks.org/resources/online-exhibits/byzantine-emperors-on-coins/the-macedonians-and-their-immediate-successors-867-1081/nomisma-tetarteron-of-romanos-iv-1068-1071>, consulted 3 August 2020); see also B. V. Pentcheva, "Coins with the Virgin," in *Byzantine Women and Their World*, ed. I. Kalavrezou (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 128–31.

21 Mango, "Constantinople as Theotokoupolis," 19–20; *idem*, "The Origins of the Blachernae Shrine at Constantinople," in *Acta XIII Congressus Internationalis Archaeologiae Christianae, Split-Poreč, September 9–October 1, 1994*, ed. N. Cambi and E. Marin,





Fig. 4. Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, south vestibule, Constantine and Justinian offer city and church to the Mother of God. Photo courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks, Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives.

two garments known eventually as her veil and her belt. The relics were strategically enshrined, one at the walls and one at the heart of the city, in round reliquary chapels called *soroi*. As her churches multiplied, they punctuated Constantinople's land walls, emblemizing impermeability and guarding the city gates.<sup>22</sup> By the 580s her image had replaced that of Victory on imperial seals.<sup>23</sup> Triumphant over nature in her virgin maternity, potent as a new Eve, and adorned with

the epithets of grace and wisdom, she assumed much the character of a guardian goddess, protecting the capital's eternal victory. These elements came together climactically in June 626, when Constantinople survived an Avar siege near the *soros* of Mary's veil, and the garment was credited with the victory.<sup>24</sup> Over the centuries, the Virgin's veil would safeguard *her* city. How truly Constantinople became Mary's city is seen in the south vestibule mosaic in Hagia Sophia (fig. 4). Here, Constantine, who had dedicated the city to Christ, and Justinian, who had dedicated the church to Christ as the Holy Wisdom, present both church and city to the enthroned Mary. As Mary's unadorned but regal appearance took predominance throughout the Christian world, the miracle of her veil also

2 vols., *Studi di antichità cristiana* 54 (Vatican City, 1998), 2:221–28; D. Krausmüller, "Making the Most of Mary: The Cult of the Virgin in the Chalkoprateia from Late Antiquity to the Tenth Century," in Brubaker and Cunningham, *Cult of the Mother of God*, 219–45.

22 As Mango ("Constantinople as Theotokoupolis," 21) notes, Prokopios speaks of the churches of Blachernai and Pege, marking the two ends of the land walls, as "invincible safeguards of the city's enclosure."

23 Ibid., 21.

24 Ibid., 21–22; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 37–43.



became embedded in Christian imagination. There is surely an echo of it in the Juggler's story.

All of this, however, is no more than background to the emotional evolution of Marian devotion, which occurred throughout the medieval world in different ways. In Byzantium, the controversy over the validity of religious images between 730 and 843 exposed and intensified dedication to Mary, drawing sharp attention to the perceptible, physical reality of Christ's incarnate body, and with it to the body of his mother.<sup>25</sup> Probing and passionate, the defenders of images found their crucial defense of God's visible materiality not in Christ but in his mother: that she was human made irrefutable the truth of his humanity. Behind the awesome logic of salvation stood Mary's willing act of giving God her flesh. The bald fact of her being Theotokos gave way to deeper questions of who she was as a mother, and how she functioned as the connective link between humankind and God. This strengthened her emotional weight, both as a loving parent and as a model for Christians of how to love God. The controversy also posed fresh questions about how Mary's body, unique in regard to the facts of life, related to the facts of her own death.

Exemplary of these heightened sensibilities is the sermon for Good Friday delivered at some point in the third quarter of the ninth century by the Constantinopolitan hierarch George of Nikomedia.<sup>26</sup> Dwelling with evocative intensity on Mary's anguished love during her son's execution, the sermon defined the identity that she would retain in Byzantium: not as St. Mary, or just Theotokos, but as the Mother of God. It emphasized, too, Christ's designation of her as the mother of his followers, and thus the caring parent of all believers. Large portions of this sermon were incorporated into the liturgy, and as Ioli Kalavrezou shows, a new repertoire of visual imagery emerged to express the magnitude of Mary's loving maternity. Images

showed Mary turned in loving care to Christ at his Crucifixion. But images also showed her turned in loving care to him as ruler, interceding on behalf of sinful Christians, her hands raised as they were under the cross to parallel her response to Christ's pain with her loving response to our pain. Such images imply Mary's concord with her son, but there were also famous stories of Mary descending into hell to demand that her angry offspring take pity on souls whom he had condemned to torment.<sup>27</sup> Mary's rebellious journey to hell, though very popular, survives in no depictions. But from the eleventh century onward, images show her in dialogue with her son, bending his retributive anger to her firm maternal will (fig. 5):

What do you want, Mother?  
The Salvation of mortals.  
They have angered me.  
Have compassion on them, my Son.  
But they do not repent.  
And save them out of charity.  
They shall be redeemed.  
Thank you, O Logos.<sup>28</sup>

Feisty beneficial tales, too, evoked her defiant protection of sinners, especially those on the brink of death.<sup>29</sup> Her own death, however, produced the most potent of the images of this time. In apocryphal accounts, Christ appeared with angels and all his apostles to take her soul to heaven (fig. 6). The message was indelible: a human mortal, by virtue of her loving bond with Christ, had been raised from death to immortality. His divinity and her mortality merged in the miracle of a new age in which humans could transcend death. The image became known not as her death but her Dormition. Within the event, Mary was

25 N. Tsironis, "The Mother of God in the Iconoclasm," in Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 27–39; I. Kalavrezou, "Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became 'Meter Theou,'" *DOP* 44 (1990): 165–72.

26 Along with a forthcoming article by Ioli Kalavrezou, see H. Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), 97–99; M. Vassilaki and N. Tsironis, "Representations of the Virgin and Their Association with the Passion of Christ," in Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 453–63; and N. J. Tsironis, "The Lament of the Virgin Mary from Romanos the Melode to George of Nicodemia" (PhD diss., Kings College, London, 1998).

27 J. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge, 2007), 399–400; A. Semoglou, *Le voyage outre-tombe de la Vierge dans l'art byzantine de la descente aux enfers à la monte au ciel* (Thessaloniki, 2003), 51–84.

28 N. P. Ševčenko, "The Metrical Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa," in *Asinou Across Time: The Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Cyprus*, ed. A. W. Carr and A. Nicolaïdès, DOS 43 (Washington, DC, 2012), 69–90, at 85–88.

29 A famous story is that of Theophilus, also known throughout the West: see J. Root, *The Theophilus Legend in Medieval Text and Image* (Woodbridge, 2017), esp. 103–62.



a



b

Fig. 5a, b. Lagoudera, Panagia tou Arakos, bema piers, dialogue of the Mother of God Eleousa and Christ Antiphonitis. Photo by author.

associated with the Ark of the Covenant, as enunciated by Andrew of Crete: “The [true] tabernacle . . . has received the heavenly ark which the ark of the Law prefigured. Behold, the new ark of God’s glory, containing ‘the golden vase, Aaron’s rod that blossomed, and the tablets of the covenant.’ Behold, the summation of all the things which the oracles of the prophets foretold.”<sup>30</sup> It was an image of consummation, viewed less as Mary’s own triumph than as the triumphant seal

of Christ’s promise that death could be defeated. It was *the* image of the good death. The Dormition appeared on devotional panels; it closes the cycles of Jesus’s life in churches; and it even appears on precious personal objects, such as rings.<sup>31</sup> As the critical link by which matter and spirit were joined to enable salvation, Mary became the heart of Byzantine faith.

30 Third Homily on the Dormition in B. E. Daley, trans., *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood, NY, 1998), 146–47. The association of Mary with the Ark is integral already to the earliest descriptions of her Dormition: see M. van Esbroeck, “The Virgin as the True Ark of the Covenant,” in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Aldershot, Hants, 2005), 63–68, at 65–66.

31 Depictions of the Dormition are numerous in mural and panel painting, and especially in ivory. For a ring bearing the theme, see Asen Kirin, ed., *Sacred Art, Secular Context: Objects of Art from the Byzantine Collection of Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., Accompanied by American Paintings from the Collection of Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss*, with contributions by J. N. Carder and R. S. Nelson (Atlanta, GA, 2005), 68, no. 14 (Dumbarton Oaks BZ.1956.15).





Fig. 6.  
Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4453,  
Gospel book of  
Otto III, cover, with  
Byzantine ivory of the  
Dormition. Courtesy  
of bpk Bildagentur /  
Art Resource, NY.

During these same centuries, Western Europe, too, grappled with the materiality of God, and this challenge also generated new, emotionally charged imagery of Christ's body.<sup>32</sup> But the critical issue here was God's real presence in the Eucharist, and it was argued through the person of Christ, not Mary. Though embraced by the Carolingian court, valued as an intercessor, and readily acknowledged as Theotokos—in the words of John Scotus, "Magna Dei genitrix, ter

felix, sancta Maria"<sup>33</sup>—she was customarily called simply St. Mary, and understood as one among the community of saints.<sup>34</sup> Her iconography was also limited by European resistance to extracanonical sources. Nonetheless, at much the same time that George of

33 Quoted by Signori, *Maria zwischen Kathedrale, Kloster und Welt*, 66, from an encomium to Charles the Bald.

34 See, e.g., D. Russo, "Les représentations mariales dans l'art d'Occident: Essai sur la formation d'une tradition iconographique," in *Marie, Le culte de la Vierge dans la société médiévale*, ed. D. Iogna-Prat, É. Palazzo, and D. Russo (Paris, 1996), 210–16; and D. Iogna-Prat, "Le culte de la Vierge sous le règne de Charles le Chauve," in *ibid.*, 71–80.

32 See C. Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion* (New York, 2001), esp. 209–38.

Nikomedes composed his famous sermon for Good Friday, a leading Carolingian theologian in the circle of Charles the Bald composed a famous explication of one of Mary's feasts, which would come, like that of George, to stand at the root of a great effusion of devotional fervor for Mary. This was Paschasius Radbertus's letter on the feast of the Dormition, customarily known after its opening words as *Cogitis me*.<sup>35</sup> Penned under the pseudonym of St. Jerome and addressed to Paula and Eustochium, it must actually have been written to Paschasius's spiritual mother, Theodrada, abbess of the imperial convent of St. Mary in Soissons, and her daughter, Irma.<sup>36</sup> The letter responds to its recipient's request for a text with which to enlighten her community about the feast. Known as the *Adsumptio*, the feast had been integrated with some difficulty into the Carolingian festal calendar because its textual sources were not only theologically ambiguous about what was assumed—Mary's spirit alone or with her body—but were wholly apocryphal, without any scriptural basis. Paschasius was unequivocal that Mary's spirit alone had been assumed, but it was the textual issue of the sources that most shaped his response.<sup>37</sup> He resolved to narrate Mary's death using only biblical texts. Inspired by the Roman liturgy current in Charles's court and by the Greek fathers' penchant for imagining dialogues between Christ and his ascendant mother, he chose as his biblical source the passionate love poem, the Song of Songs. In words of rapt delectation, he unfolded the story of Mary's ascent using the words of the poem. His letter tells of her coming "to the ethereal bridal

chamber."<sup>38</sup> Its narrative is set in motion by the most recurrent of the Song of Songs' verses, put in the mouth of the Holy Ghost: *Who is she who ascends through the desert like a column of smoke from the spices* (Song 3:6),<sup>39</sup> and *Who is she who ascends like the rising dawn, beautiful as the moon, chosen as the sun, terrible as a battle line drawn up from the camps* (Song 6:9).<sup>40</sup> These lines invite the explication of both the person and the event. Christ extols the wonder of her virgin maternity: *she is a closed garden, a fountain sealed* (Song 4:12).<sup>41</sup> He invites her: *Come, my dove, come from Lebanon, for the winter is past* (Song 2:11; 4:8).<sup>42</sup> Paschasius does not place in Mary's mouth the bride's words that she languishes with love (Song 5:8), but he emphasizes how truly she suffers with love.<sup>43</sup> She rises like smoke, he says, because Symeon's sword had pierced her soul, making her more than a martyr, for she suffered not in body but in mind: "her 'love was stronger than death' [Song 8:6], for she made Christ's death her own."<sup>44</sup> The intensity that had gathered between Mary and her image-defender

35 A. Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief IX "Cogitis me": Ein erster marianischer Traktat des Mittelalters von Paschalius Radbert*, Collegium Friburgense 9 (Freiburg, 1962), reprinted in *Paschali Radberti De Partu Virginis*, ed. E. A. Matter, *De Assumptione Sanctae Mariae Virginis*, ed. Alberti Ripberger, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 61C (Turnhout, 1985). Its presumed composition for Theodrada suggests a date before her death in 846. Ripberger proposes a date in the 830s (p. 45); H. Mayr-Harting ("The Idea of the Assumption of Mary in the West, 800–1200," in *The Church and Mary*, ed. R. N. Swanson [Suffolk, 2004], 87) prefers the 840s. George of Nikomedes must have composed his Good Friday sermon between the triumph over Iconoclasm in 843 and his death in 880.

36 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 16.

37 As demonstrated in R. Fulton's brilliant article "'Quae est ista quae ascendit sicut aurora consurgens?' The Song of Songs as the Historia for the Office of the Assumption," *MedSt* 60 (1998): 55–122.

38 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 77, §45; Matter, *De Assumptione*, 128, §45 extolling the day "in qua gloriosa et felix ad aethereum pervenit thalamum."

39 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 78, §46; Matter, *De Assumptione*, 128, §46: "De qua rursus idem Spiritus Sanctus in eisdem Canticis: *Quae est ista, quae ascendit per desertum, quasi virgula fumi ex aromatibus*." In conformity with scholars of the various Song of Songs commentaries, the words adopted from the Song of Songs are here italicized.

40 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 78, §47; Matter, *De Assumptione*, 129, §47: "*Quae est ista quae ascendit*, inquit, *quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata*." As E. A. Matter (*The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* [Philadelphia, 1990], 153) points out, this replaces the Vulgate *progredditur* with *ascendit*, a replacement found already in the Assumption liturgy as preserved in the antiphoner closest in time to Radbertus. This shows clearly that he was inspired by the liturgy.

41 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 85, §59; Matter, *De Assumptione*, 135–36, §59: "*Hortus conclusus, fons signatus emissiones tuae paradisi*" (Song 4:12).

42 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 84, §57; Matter, *De Assumptione*, 134, §57: "*Veni*, inquit, *Columba mea, immaculata mea; iam enim hiems abiit et recessit*. Ac deinde inquit: *Veni de Libano, ueni*" (Song 2:11; 4:8).

43 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 96–97, §82 and §83; Matter, *De Assumptione*, 150, §82 and §83.

44 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 101, §90; Matter, *De Assumptione*, 151, §90: "*dilectio amplius fortis quam mors*, quia mortem Christi suam fecit."



devotees in Byzantium flames out here in passionate words exchanged by Christ and Mary. Like George of Nikomedia, Paschasius conjures a Mary riven by love and pain, but his context is more bridal than maternal, and he offers an eschatological template, inviting the listening nuns to prepare their own ascension by emulating Mary's virginal love.<sup>45</sup> As George's text had been in Byzantium, Paschasius's words were integrated into the liturgy throughout the Carolingian world, displacing the troublesome apocrypha. By the end of the ninth century, the liturgy inspired a remarkable Dormition ritual in Rome in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, where this article began.<sup>46</sup> In it the passionate words Paschasius had invoked were acted out between two ancient icons, as the Achiropitos from the Lateran was processed through the city to Santa Maria Maggiore, meeting and greeting as it did so a comparably venerable icon of Mary, reenacting Christ's arrival at his mother's deathbed.

This was a uniquely Western liturgy.<sup>47</sup> The Greek fathers, especially John of Damascus, had drawn on the Song of Songs in imagining the words of Christ at his mother's Dormition.<sup>48</sup> But none had applied any of its words to Mary, amply as they

imagined her speaking at her Assumption,<sup>49</sup> and at no point before Paschasius's letter had Mary been seen as the poem's voice. As Karl Shuve says, "Paschasius's sermon marked the faint beginnings of a new mode of Song of Songs exegesis, one in which Mary was taken to be the subject of the poem."<sup>50</sup> The impact of this shift on Marian imagery was slow to kindle, and it took more than two centuries for it to appear in art. But an underlying premise emerges clearly in the earliest depictions of the theme as it was adopted in the West. In the Benedictional of St. Aethelwold, produced in Anglo-Saxon Winchester, the image includes neither Christ nor the soul of his mother (fig. 7); instead, the recumbent Mary is canopied by an angelic host bearing a crown and scepter.<sup>51</sup> It is not his descent but her own triumph as queen of heaven that is proclaimed. Ottonian versions of the event, largely painted at Reichenau, do include both Christ and Mary's spirit, but the energy of the images is again entirely hers: she is borne upward to his silent presence by angels (fig. 8).<sup>52</sup> Reichenau's community knew Byzantium well; a fine Byzantine ivory plaque with the Dormition is embedded in the cover of the Gospel book illuminated there for Otto III (fig. 6).<sup>53</sup> But they were clearly conveying something different than the Greeks in their depictions. As in Winchester, the point is not Christ's descent for Mary's soul as she dies, but her ascent to reign as his consort and queen.

45 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 25.

46 Of the extensive bibliography on this ceremony, see K. Noreen, "Shaping the Sacred: Icons, Processions, and the Presence of the Holy," in *Icons and the Liturgy, East and West: History, Theology, and Culture*, ed. N. Denysenko (Notre Dame, IN, 2017), 77–103, at 85–86; W. Tronzo, "Apse Decoration, the Liturgy, and the Perception of Art in Medieval Rome: S. Maria in Trastevere and S. Maria Maggiore," in *Italian Church Decoration of the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: Functions, Forms, and Regional Traditions*, ed. W. Tronzo, 2 vols. (Bologna, 1989), 1:167–93; and G. Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani: Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter* (Weinheim, 1990), 37–78. The icon greeted in the ceremony became in time the icon known as Salus Populi Romani at Santa Maria Maggiore, but different icons may have served earlier.

47 Lines from the Song of Songs are applied to Mary in the Roman liturgy of several different feasts, as shown by M. A. Lavin, "Cimabue's Life of Mary: Mother and Bride," in M. A. Lavin and I. Lavin, *The Liturgy of Love: Images from the Song of Songs in the Art of Cimabue, Michelangelo, and Rembrandt*, The Franklin D. Murphy Lectures 14 (Lawrence, KS, 2001), on 30–33 of the epilogue published in the book as posted on [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu), consulted 3 August 2020. By contrast, the Song of Songs is absent from the Orthodox liturgy, as seen in Mother Mary and K. Ware, trans., *The Festal Menaion* (London, 1969).

48 See *On the Dormition of Mary*: Andrew of Crete in his Second Homily on the Dormition, 141; John of Damascus in his Second

Homily on the Dormition, 214; John of Damascus in his Third Homily on the Dormition, 235–36.

49 See *On the Dormition of Mary*: Andrew of Crete in his Second Homily on the Dormition, 123; Germanos in his First Homily on the Dormition, 170–72; and John of Damascus in his Second Homily on the Dormition, 214, all of whom imagine a very voluble Mary.

50 K. Shuve, *The Song of Songs and the Fashioning of Identity in Early Latin Christianity* (Oxford, 2016), 171.

51 R. Deshman, *The Benedictional of Aethelwold* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), 124–38. The extensive exegesis of the image that is given here shows that a great many messages are packed into its elements, but it is important also to note the elements that are absent.

52 Of the extensive literature on these miniatures, see esp. Mayr-Harting, "Idea of the Assumption," 87–99; idem, *Ottonian Book Illumination: An Historical Study*, 2 vols. (London, 1987; repr. Oxford, 1991), 1:140–80; R. Kahsnitz, "Koimesis–Dormitio–Assumptio: Byzantinisches und Antikes in den Miniaturen des Liuthargruppe," in *Florilegium in Honorem Carl Nordenfalk Octogenarii Contextum*, ed. P. Bjurström, N.-G. Hökby, and F. Mutherich, Nationalmuseums Skriftserie, n.s. 9 (Stockholm, 1987), 91–122.

53 Mayr-Harting, *Ottonian Book Illumination*, 1:156, pl. 92.



Fig. 7.  
London, British  
Library, Ms. add.  
49598, fol. 102v,  
Benedictional of  
Aethelwold,  
Dormition of the  
Virgin. Courtesy of  
the British Library.



Mary's queenly identity emerges even in worldly politics: the figure who in Byzantium had loomed above empire, guarding the head of state regardless of gender, lends her hand among the Ottonian/Salian rulers to the distaff side. As the male Ottos, father and son, display their status in the Castel Sforzesco ivory by touching the enthroned Christ, Mary touches the crown of the empress Theophano;<sup>54</sup> and in the Speyer Gospels, Mary crowns the empress Agnes while accepting a gift

from the already crowned emperor Henry III (fig. 9).<sup>55</sup> Henry's crown and gift are due to Christ, but he is not there. Mary's lap is empty, and her authority and attention are for the empress. In neither of these cases is Mary crowned, though the heavenly crown does descend upon figures of Mother and Child in Ottonian imagery, as in the glittering bifolium prefacing Bernward of Hildesheim's Precious Gospels, where Bernward gazes over the altar as angels crown an enthroned Virgin

54 In color in M. Brandt and A. Eggebrecht, eds., *Bernward von Hildesheim und das Zeitalter der Ottonen*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim and Mainz am Rhein, 1993), 2:66, no. II 25.

55 K. Collins, "Visualizing Mary: Innovation and Exegesis in Ottonian Manuscript Illumination" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 114.





Fig. 8.  
Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4452,  
fol. 161v, Pericopes of  
Henry II, Dormition of  
the Virgin. Courtesy  
of bpk Bildagentur /  
Art Resource, NY.

and Child (fig. 10). What was intimated in the Speyer frontispiece, however—that Mary as queen is not the custodian of Christ’s infancy but the consort of his maturity—had been seen already on folios 40v and 41r of the Petershausen Sacramentary (fig. 11), contemporary with the Castello Sforzesco ivory, in which Mary sits crowned at Christ’s right, encircled in an aureole identical to his, and bearing in her lap not a child but the scepter and book of her authority as queen.<sup>56</sup> The

figures’ juxtaposition as a couple resonates with the vivid language of Paschasius’s *Cogitis me* on the feast of the Dormition, in which Mary ascends to Christ’s side as his bride and beloved. The enthroned and childless

<sup>56</sup> See *ibid.*, 116–57; A. von Euw, “Der Darmstädter Gero-Codex und die künstlerisch verwandten Reichenauer Prachthandschriften,” in *Kaiserin Theophanu: Begegnung des Ostens und Westens um die*

*Wende des ersten Jahrtausends; Gedenkschrift des Kölner Schnütgen-Museums zum 1000. Todesjahr der Kaiserin*, ed. A. von Euw and P. Schreiner, 2 vols. (Cologne, 1991), 1:191–226, at 210–15. Von Euw’s association of Mary’s presentation as *consors imperii* here with Byzantium involves a complex misalignment, for that title belonged to the Ottonian queen specifically in her capacity as the spouse of the ruler, while the Byzantine empress held her authority as *augusta* in her own right, not as the emperor’s spouse. She could stand in any of a range of familial relations to the emperor: mother, aunt, sister, as well as spouse.



Fig. 9.  
 Madrid, Real  
 Biblioteca del  
 Monasterio San  
 Lorenzo del Escorial,  
 vitrinas 17, fol. 3r,  
 Speyer Gospels,  
 Virgin Mary with  
 Emperor Henry III  
 and Empress Agnes of  
 Poitou. Courtesy of  
 the Real Biblioteca.



Marys of Ottonian imagery are not numerous, but they are striking.<sup>57</sup> They have been linked with the political status of the Ottonian empresses, who were titled

*consors imperii*—consort in imperial power.<sup>58</sup> This title was conferred only and solely on the ruler's spouse. As such, it has implications when related to Mary: it shifts her relationship from maternal custodian to consort of her son.

But the empire of the Ottonians and Salians was not the only power mobilizing Mary in the West. By

57 Along with the Speyer Gospels and the Petershausen Sacramentary, Collins ("Visualizing Mary") cites the Virgin in Glory in the Prüm Troper, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 9448, fol. 62v (fig. 33); the Virgin with Svanhild and Brigida in the Gospels of Abbess Svanhild of Essen, Manchester, John Rylands Library, Ms. no. 110, fol. 17 (fig. 42); and the Virgin in Glory crowning St. Margaret and St. Regina in the Lives of Kilian and Margaret, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Ms. I 189, fol. 11v (fig. 44).

58 Ibid., 86–88, and the preceding note. On the title *consors imperii*, see S. MacLean, *Ottonian Queenship* (New York, 2017), 210–11 and passim.





Fig. 10. Hildesheim, Domschatz, Ms. 18, fols. 16v–17r, Precious Gospel book of Bernward of Hildesheim, Bernward presenting gospel book and Virgin crowned by angels. Courtesy of Wikimedia (public domain).



a



b

Fig. 11a–b. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Sal. IXb, fols. 40v–41r, Petershausen Sacramentary, Mary and Christ in Glory. Courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek.



Fig. 12.  
New York, Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, acc. no. 67.153,  
Virgin in Majesty. Photo courtesy  
of the Metropolitan Museum of  
Art / The Cloisters Collection  
and James J. Rorimer Memorial  
Fund, 1967 (public domain).



the year 1000, the Church was already well committed to what would be called the Gregorian Reform, to free itself from secular, especially imperial, interference. The Church, too, found its emblem and embodiment in the figure of a regally authoritative Mary.<sup>59</sup> Dominant here was the maternal metaphor linking Mary with the Church as the bearer of the body of God and the avenue of access to him: in Peter Damian's words, "as the Son of God has deigned to descend to us through you, so

we also must come to him through you."<sup>60</sup> Her authority as mediator presumed her Assumption, present as the queen in heaven and accessible to Christ. Only sporadically did this confer a crown on her images.<sup>61</sup> But she was always enthroned, often explicitly upon the throne of Solomon with its lions, as the Throne of

60 Quoted from Peter Damian by H. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London, 1985), 207.

61 As R. Fulton (*From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* [New York, 2002], 218) points out, Mary is always presented as queen of heaven in the miracle stories of the tenth through twelfth centuries, but this did not assume the political dimension that it did in Ottonian imagery.

59 Signori, *Maria zwischen Kathedrale, Kloster und Welt*, 63–76; Russo, "Les representations mariales," 132–48.



Wisdom, bonded as if bodily with the upright form of her child. She is his seat. She appeared in this guise in many media—in manuscripts, but also mural painting and the sculpted tympana of churches—and above all wooden statues, which made this visualization of her most compelling (fig. 12).<sup>62</sup> These were rarely life-sized, and they were often kept in the church crypts, as was the example in *The Jongleur of Notre Dame*, but their impact remains indelible. Known as Majesties, they offer Mary as the very image and embodiment of the Church. In a way, they present her not so much as the Theotokos, though she clearly does bear Christ, but as the Theotopos, the place where he is. And people did come. Over the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries, as the reform movement grew stronger, Mary began to take a place among the saints whose shrines were sites of pilgrimage. The great early impresarios of the pilgrimage movement were monastic communities, but the pilgrims whom they drew were dominantly lay people, a factor to which Mary proved especially responsive. By the early twelfth century, a matrix of major Marian pilgrimage centers had emerged among the saints' shrines.<sup>63</sup> Like those of the saints, her shrines were sites of miracles, especially of healing, but also of liberation from captivity, or from demons come to claim an errant soul.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to the Byzantine Mary, who, when she challenges divine judgments, confronts Christ, the Western Mary characteristically goes after the devil.<sup>65</sup> Unlike those of the saints, however,

Mary's major pilgrimage shrines were dominantly cathedrals, not monasteries, with urban as well as rural clientele, and along with pilgrimage, their fundraising campaigns to raise or repair the buildings offered fertile contexts for miraculous events. Unlike the saints, moreover, who usually had just one major pilgrimage site, Mary had many. One after another of these shrines compiled miracle collections,<sup>66</sup> and as they did so, Marian miracles began to assume a cumulative weight. It thrust Mary above all the saints as the miracle-worker *par excellence*.

The Byzantines, too, were busy cultivating Mary as a pilgrimage destination in the eleventh century. They did it through the form of art that the image defenders had enabled: the icon, the holy image that connects saint and devotee. The icon was a domain in which the Mother of God truly excelled. Miracle-working icons of Mary far outnumbered those of any other figure. Little is known about miracle-working icons beyond Constantinople,<sup>67</sup> but that city had a roster of internationally famous pilgrimage icons of Mary.<sup>68</sup> An icon at Mount Sinai depicts five venerated images, including especially famous examples (fig. 13).<sup>69</sup> The central figure of the enthroned Virgin and the one farthest to the right seem to represent a mosaic and an enameled plaque in the church of Hagia Sophia; the other three had citywide prominence. The other figure to the right

62 Magnificently studied by I. H. Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France* (Princeton, NJ, 1972).

63 Signori (*Maria zwischen Kathedrale, Kloster und Welt*, 26) lists the thirteen sites that published compilations of Marian miracles: Reims, Coutances, Laon, Soissons, Saint-Pierre sur Dives, Rocamadour, Chartres, Lausanne, Saint-Dié, Strassburg, and Beaune, whose texts still survive, and Déols and Saint-Omer, whose texts are lost. But she cautions that pilgrimage to Marian sites went far beyond those major thirteen (p. 28).

64 On the miracle stories, see M. Bull, *The Miracles of Our Lady of Rocamadour: Analysis and Translation* (Woodbridge, 1999); G. Philippart, "Le récit miraculaire marial dans l'Occident médiéval," in Iogna-Prat, Palazzo, and Russo, *Marie, Le culte de la Vierge*, 563–90; and B. Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event, 1000–1215* (Philadelphia, 1982).

65 Exemplary here is the miracle of Theophilus, the most widely imaged of all Marian miracle stories, on which see Root, *The Theophilus Legend*, but as Philippart ("Le récit miraculaire marial," 571) points out, the soteriological miracle, in which Mary intervenes

in the afterlife to seize the soul of a sinner from a demon, is one of the most characteristic of the Western miracle types.

66 Signori (*Maria zwischen Kathedrale, Kloster und Welt*, 25, n. 34) lists the miracle books in chronological order of their compilation.

67 Holy Land pilgrims' accounts in the wake of the Crusades cite many miracle-working icons of Mary in Syria/Palestine, at Saydnaya, Calamon, Antioch, Tortosa, Antalya, and Nicosia. It is hard to know how old these cults were, and whether they reflected a pattern seen throughout the Byzantine world or were a locally specific product of concentrated religious tourism.

68 Pentcheva (*Icons and Power*) discusses three especially famous examples: the Maria Romaia, the icon of the "Usual Miracle" at Blachernai, and the Hodegetria. See also A. W. Carr, "Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople," *DOP* 56 (2002): 75–92.

69 On the icon see Z. Skhirtladze, "The Image of the Virgin on the Sinai Hexptych and the Apse Mosaic of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople," *DOP* 68 (2014): 369–86; G. Galavaris, *An Eleventh-Century Hexptych of the Saint Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai*, Library of Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies 45 (Venice and Athens, 2009), 25–27, pl. 1; and G. A. Soteriou and M. Soteriou, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Μονῆς Σινᾶ*, 2 vols., Collection de l'Institut français d'Athènes 100 (Athens, 1956–58), 1: pls. 146–49, 2: 125–28.



Fig. 13. Sinai, Monastery of St. Catherine, Hexaptych, panel with five images of the Mother of God. Photo courtesy of the Monastery of Saint Catherine.

is identified as the Hagiosoritissa, after the *soros* that housed Mary's belt. Until the tenth century, the *soros* had been most famous for its relic; by the late eleventh, it was even more famous for its icons.<sup>70</sup> The icon farthest left, in turn, labeled Blachernitissa, bears the name of the church that housed the Virgin's veil. That church had gathered several remarkable icons, in particular a hidden one that performed its own miracle to huge crowds on Friday evenings, when the veil before it rose miraculously to reveal the image radiant and transfigured.<sup>71</sup> Though the ancient veil relic was still

carried by the emperors when they went to war—Anna Komnene speaks of her father carrying it as a battle standard in 1089<sup>72</sup>—the church that preserved it had flashy new icons now to sustain its fame. Both the old veil relic and the new veil icon were recounted with fascination in Western European compendia of Mary's miracles.<sup>73</sup>

*l'espace ecclesial: Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental*, ed. S. Brodbeck and A.-O. Poilpré, with collaboration of M. Stavrou, *Byzantina Sorbonensia* 30 (Paris, 2019), 173–81; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 145–63; S. Papaioannou, "The 'Usual Miracle' and an Unusual Image: Psellos and the Icons of Blachernai," *JÖB* 51 (2001): 177–88; and J. Cotsonis, "The Virgin with the Tongues on Byzantine Seals," *DOP* 48 (1994): 221–27, at 225–27.

<sup>72</sup> Anna Komnene, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnena*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter (London, 1969), 225–27; B. Leib, ed., *Anne Comnène Alexiade*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1933), 2:98. This is, admittedly, the last time it is known to have been taken to war, and its fate is ambiguous, for the standard-bearer was wounded and left it hidden in a bush.

<sup>73</sup> Eventually recounted by Gautier de Coincy and widely repeated, it had already appeared in a twelfth-century compendium of Marian

<sup>70</sup> The identity of the Hagiosoritissa remains unclear—see Carr, "Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage," 78–79—but the Chalkoprateia was certainly famous for its icon of Christ "the Responder": C. Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen, 1959), 132.

<sup>71</sup> M. Parani, "Experiencing Miraculous Icons in Byzantium: The Examples of the Icon of the 'Usual Miracle' and the Hodegetria in Constantinople," in *Visibilité et présence de l'image dans*



Even more famous than the veil icon was the icon whose image is most worn in the Sinai painting. This was the Hodegetria, showing Mary with Christ on her left arm and gesturing to him with her right. The Hodegetria was a relic in its own right, believed to have been painted in Mary's presence by the Evangelist Luke.<sup>74</sup> It was processed through the city each Tuesday in elaborate ceremonial appearances that attracted crowds of thousands and precipitated miracles. As the veil relic had been earlier, the Hodegetria was honored now as the guardian and protector of Constantinople, and the Mary whom it conveyed commandeered the fate of empires.

A good deal of thought has been given to the question of whether the Western European Majesties were looked upon in the same way as icons, as holy images capable of instigating miracles.<sup>75</sup> In the end, there is only modest evidence that they were in fact regarded as sites of miracles. They were active figures—in many churches they actually played the part of Mary in liturgical dramas, especially that of the Adoration of the Magi.<sup>76</sup> The theme of kings doing obeisance to the Church no doubt appealed strongly to the reform clergy, but it was Mary's relics, not the Majesties, that took center stage when miracles happened. Nonetheless, the stories make it transparently clear that the Marian events in Constantinople did affect the ones in the West. This is evident in the first dramatic Marian relic miracle in the West, said to have occurred in 911 CE at Chartres. Threatened by Norman invasion, the bishop took the cathedral's greatest treasure to the battlements of the town.<sup>77</sup> This was the relic of the Virgin Mary's chemise, a gift from the Carolingian emperor Charles the Bald. When the garment's folds spread out on the wind, the Norman forces crumbled, and Chartres was saved. The event replayed the Constantinopolitan miracle of 626. It made a great impact on the Normans,

who incorporated into it the story of their defeated leader Rollo's conversion to Christianity.<sup>78</sup> How truly Constantinople was a part of the story for them is seen in William of Malmesbury's retelling, for he not only specifies the relic's origin in Constantinople but speaks of its display "in the fashion of a banner."<sup>79</sup> This is just the way the *Alexiad* had described the emperor's use of the relic of the Virgin's veil in war.<sup>80</sup> Unequivocally though William uses the word "chemise," the veil relic ripples behind his words,<sup>81</sup> and the veil is Mary's most eloquent garment in Anglo-Norman art: in the Gospel book of Judith of Flanders (fig. 14), Mary lifts her veil to Christ's face;<sup>82</sup> in the New Minster *Liber Vitae*, Mary "crowns" Queen Emma with her veil (again, Mary sides with the queen).<sup>83</sup> But the story of the Juggler has its own echo of Chartres's miracle, when Mary wipes the exhausted Juggler's face with her veil. At much the time the Juggler's story was written, the Charlemagne window in Chartres's cathedral was crafted to show how its relic had been an imperial gift to Charlemagne himself in Constantinople.<sup>84</sup> The same gift had included some of Mary's hairs: several of them emerged as major pilgrimage objects at the cathedral of Laon,<sup>85</sup> and

78 Ibid., 16–17.

79 J. A. Giles, *William of Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England: From the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen*, Bohn's Antiquarian Library (London, 1847), 125. The Latin, cited by Signori (*Maria zwischen Kathedrale, Kloster und Welt*, 180, n. 35), reads: "Namque cives, nec armis nec muris confisi, Beate Marie auxilium implorant camisiarumque gloriosissime Virginis quam, a Constantinopoli sibi allatum, unus ex Karolis ibi posuerat, super propugnacula in modum vexilli ventis exponent."

80 See n. 72 above.

81 A factor in this conflation may well be the fact that when Chartres's reliquary was opened in 1717, it yielded not a tunic but a veil: A. W. Carr, "Threads of Authority: The Virgin Mary's Veil in the Middle Ages," in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. S. Gordon (Boston, 2001), 72–73.

82 E. Temple, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles*, vol. 2, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900–1066*, ed. J. J. G. Alexander (London, 1976), pl. 289.

83 Ibid., pl. 244. It is London, British Library, Stowe 944, fol. 6.

84 E. Pastan, "Charlemagne as Saint? Relics and the Choice of Window Subjects at Chartres Cathedral," in *The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages: Power, Faith, and Crusade*, ed. M. Gabriele and J. Stuckey (New York, 2008), 97–113, with earlier bibliography; C. Maines, "The Charlemagne Window at Chartres Cathedral: New Considerations on Text and Image," *Speculum* 52 (1977): 810–23.

85 Signori, *Maria zwischen Kathedrale, Kloster und Welt*, 99, n. 2.

miracles: A. Mussafia, "Studien zu den mittelalterlichen Marienlegenden, III," *SBWien* 119 (1889): 18, no. 40, quoted from a fifteenth-century manuscript that, as noted on p. 20, copies the twelfth-century Ms. 18659 in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich.

74 Parani, "Experiencing Miraculous Icons," 182–94; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 109–43, 173–77; C. Angelidi and T. Papamastorakis, "The Veneration of the Hodegetria and the Hodegon Monastery," in Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 373–87.

75 See, above all, Forsyth, *Throne of Wisdom*, 8–11, 31–60.

76 Ibid., 55–57.

77 M. E. Fassler, *The Virgin of Chartres: Making History through Liturgy and the Arts* (New Haven and London, 2010), 16–27.

Fig. 14.  
New York, Morgan  
Library and Museum,  
Ms. M 709, fol. 1v,  
Gospel book of Judith  
of Flanders, Crucifixion.  
Courtesy the Morgan  
Library and Museum.



another at the cathedral at Coutances was mobilized for pilgrimage, also.<sup>86</sup> Both the cathedral at Le Puy and the venerable convent of the Virgin at Soissons had slippers of the Virgin Mary.<sup>87</sup> The origin of these relics is obscure, but their character as textile garments assured both their origin in the East and their kinship to the textile relics in Constantinople. Mary's ongoing

miracles in Constantinople furnished the exemplary pattern for exploiting such exotica and surely helped to fuel the European explosion of Marian miracles. But it was not because the images were working in the same way; it was because Mary was, by making miracles through things associated with her. The things that stood out in European imagination were the relics.

By the end of the eleventh century in Byzantium, Mary's icons were shifting to give richer expression to her complex, typologically freighted humanity. This

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 129, n. 22.





Fig. 15.  
Sinai, Monastery of  
St. Catherine, Mother  
of God with prophets,  
saints, and Christ as  
King of Glory. Courtesy  
of the Monastery of  
Saint Catherine.

is epitomized by the devotional icon at Mount Sinai showing the tenderly entwined Mother and Child framed by figures of the protoparents, Mary's own parents and earthly spouse, her son in glory, and the biblical prophets who had proclaimed her coming (fig. 15).<sup>88</sup>

A human, with human parents, she is at the same time meshed by typology into sacred history and set by her maternity at the very heart of salvation. Her gaze turns to Symeon, prophet of the sword that would pierce her heart, and his message takes poignant visibility in her

88 E. Jeffreys, "The Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos in Their Twelfth-Century Context," in *The Reception of the Virgin in Byzantium: Marian Narratives in Texts and Images*, ed. T. Arentzen and M. B. Cunningham (Cambridge and New York, 2019), 300–302;

Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 314–16, no. 28 (T. Papamastorakis); and D. Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century," in *The Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, ed. K. A. Manafis (Athens, 1990), 105, 385, nn. 26–28, pl. 19.



Fig. 16.  
Moscow, Tretyakov  
Gallery, The Virgin of  
Vladimir. Courtesy of  
HIP / Art Resource, NY.



pose, as she bends to nuzzle a restive child who twists his lightly clad body in a prefiguration of the cross.<sup>89</sup> The compounding of historical, soteriological, and allegorical themes seen here was beginning to find a counterpart in Marian imagery in the West at this time as well, but the nuanced expression of Mary's emotions at the icon's core was distinctively Byzantine. More and more frequently, figures of Mother and Child in

Byzantium were shown bending to each other in evocative tenderness.<sup>90</sup> The most famous example of this

89 See A. W. Carr, "The Presentation of an Icon at Mount Sinai," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.*, ser. 4, 17 (1993–94): 238–48.

90 See, esp., H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago and London, 1994), 261–96. It is certainly true that deeply affecting images of Mary existed already in the tenth century, and that the comparatively larger number of such icons after the late eleventh century accompanies the comparatively larger number of icons of any kind at that time. Nonetheless, the emphasis on emotion in Komnenian literature, artistic style, and iconographic preference, and the slowly growing prevalence of devotional services such as vigils, which were



emotive animation is the miracle-working icon known as the Virgin of Vladimir (fig. 16), in which the two convergent faces and the tender embrace of Christ's hand on Mary's neck still preserve the original paint layer of about 1130,<sup>91</sup> much the date now assigned to the Sinai icon, too.<sup>92</sup> The piercing emotive sweetness of postures like these captivated Western European viewers with a timeliness and force that Byzantine art had rarely exercised upon them before.

The swift intensity of its impact is seen in juxtaposing the icon on Sinai with a pair of images from the same early twelfth-century period in the West.<sup>93</sup> They show the Tree of Jesse, one of the compositions emerging in Western art to visualize Mary's multivalent typology. Like the Sinai icon, the Jesse Tree presents Mary as the realization of Old Testament prophecy, most centrally Isaiah 11:1–2 (*egredietur virga*) and Isaiah 7:14 (*ecce virgo concipiet*), depicting her as the stem of a tree with Christ at its apex.<sup>94</sup> An exemplary version of the theme is seen in the mid-twelfth-century Lambeth Bible from Canterbury, in which allegories of Mary's virtues and joys and her personification as the Church unveiling Synagoga amplify the messages of the prophets around her.<sup>95</sup> Mary herself, however, is sweet and straight as an arrow, innocent of any emotion and bearing no child, since Christ has his own place above. A very different approach to the theme had appeared in the work of a painter who was active in the first third of the century in France. He produced two versions of the Jesse Tree. One version, illuminating the opening

initial for the feast of Mary's birth, shows the prophets not only proclaiming but dramatically enacting their prophetic miracles (fig. 17).<sup>96</sup> At the center of their activity, Mary, too, begins to act. She not only holds a child but pointedly offers him her breast in an awkward but explicit gesture of maternal care. The Virgin *lactans* was rare enough in European imagery that it must have been chosen deliberately here to emphasize Mary's humanity. Christ, in fact, appears only as the recipient of her care; the dove of prophecy perches at the top, and it is not God but Mary's life-sustaining humanity that constitutes the core of the composition. The emphatic epithet "Theotokos" is as much a counterpoint as a complement to her attentive physicality. Mary's humanity is emphasized again, with imposing economy, in his other version. Illuminating the opening initial of Jerome's commentary on Isaiah, the miniature distills Mary visually from Isaiah's prophetic words, isolating her over Jesse as a single, statuesque figure on their own page (fig. 18). Her posture focuses attention squarely on her maternal responsiveness, once again using for the purpose what must have been a very deliberately selected visual type. It adopts exactly the kind of tender, intimate, face-to-face relationship that the Byzantine images had developed. It is, in fact, very much the type of the Vladimir Virgin, with the Christ child placing a tiny arm around his mother's neck and nestling his face beneath her pensive eyes (fig. 16). Mary not only moves here; she is moving.

The painter's initials adorn manuscripts produced for Stephen Harding, one of the founders of the Cistercian Order, and abbot at the time Bernard of Clairvaux joined the order in 1112. His work surely reflects both the intense devotion to Mary and the centrality of love as a spiritual tool that come out so compellingly in Bernard's writing. Anselm of Canterbury, where the Lambeth Bible would be painted, had already written of Mary not simply as a mediator and

often performed before Marian icons, show that a context for expressive Marian imagery must have existed.

91 A. V. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums*, trans. I. Sorokina (Leningrad, 1977; New York, 1978), 22, pls. 235, 236; A. I. Anisimov, *Our Lady of Vladimir* (Prague, 1928).

92 See Papamastorakis in n. 88 above.

93 These are Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale, Ms. 129, a lectionary, and Ms. 641, the first volume of Jerome's commentary on Isaiah. W. Cahn, *Romanesque Manuscripts: The Twelfth Century*, 2 vols. (London, 1996), 2:76, no. 61, and 2:78, no. 62, favors a date between 1125 and 1130 for Ms. 129 and one between 1130 and 1140 for Ms. 641; Y. Załuska (*L'enluminure et le scriptorium de Cîteaux au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle* [Cîteaux, 1989], 113) does not rule out a date as late as the 1130s but prefers the first quarter of the century for both.

94 Ibid., 134–42; G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. J. Seligman, 2 vols. (Greenwich, CT, 1969), 1:15–22; A. Watson, *The Early Iconography of the Tree of Jesse* (London, 1934).

95 D. M. Shepard, *Introducing the Lambeth Bible: A Study of Texts and Imagery* (Turnhout, 2007), 144–51, 311, pl. 10.

96 On this image, see *ibid.*, 145; Cahn, *Romanesque Manuscripts*, 76; Załuska, *L'enluminure*, 138–41, pl. 15; A. Vannugli, "Il 'secondo maestro' di Cîteaux e la sua attività in Botgogna," *Arte medievale*, n.s. 3/2 (1989): 51–72, at 58–59, English summary as "The 'Second Master' of Cîteaux and His Work in Burgundy," 71–72; and Watson, *Early Iconography*, 91. The miniature accompanies Fulbert's sermon for 8 September on Mary's birth, but the prophetic miracles selected—Daniel unharmed amid lions; the Hebrew youths in the furnace; Moses and the Burning Bush; and Gideon and the dew on the fleece—relate not to his words but to Mary herself.



Fig. 17.  
Dijon, Bibliothèque  
municipale, Ms. 641,  
fol. 40v, Citeaux  
Lectionary, Tree of  
Jesse. Courtesy of DeA  
Picture Library / Art  
Resource, NY.



intercessor, but as the very means of the human spirit to the love of God,<sup>97</sup> and Bernard amplified his message. The sermons of both men helped create a context conducive to the Byzantine types showing Mary both in motion and emotionally moving. The painter's Jesse Tree in the Jerome manuscript has consistently been associated with the sermons of Bernard, and twice

specifically with his sermons on the Song of Songs.<sup>98</sup> M. Kilian Hufgard does so guardedly, associating its

98 As noted by Zaluska, *L'enluminure*, 137, citing Schiller, *Iconography*, 1:15; G. Cames, "Parfums et diadème: Le Cantique des Cantiques dans l'iconographie mariale romane," in *Miscellanea codicologica F. Masai dicata*, ed. P. Cockshaw, M.-C. Garand, and P. Jodogne, 2 vols. (Ghent, 1979), 1:241–48, at 241–44; and M. K. Hufgard, "An Inspirational and Iconographic Source for Two Early Cistercian Miniatures," *Studies in Art and Architecture* 3, ed. M. Lillich, Cistercian Studies Series 89 (Kalamazoo, MI, 1987), 69–80.

97 Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 195–239; Graef, *Mary*, 212–18.





Fig. 18.  
Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale,  
Ms. 129, fol. 4v, Commentaries  
of St. Jerome on Isaiah, Tree of  
Jesse. Courtesy of the  
Bibliothèque municipale.

isolation of Mary and Jesse with Bernard's allusion to them in his second sermon on the Song of Songs and then noting the aptness of Mary's posture to the sermon's theme, which is the poem's first line: *Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth*.<sup>99</sup> By contrast, Gérard Cames concludes emphatically from the gifts of the two angels—a crown and what he identifies as a perfume flask—that Mary must be Bernard's bride of the Song of Songs.<sup>100</sup>

That Mary's tender posture might invite association with the passionate bride of the Song of Songs raises at least two questions. One concerns its Eastern source. Mary's posture in the initial seems rooted, as noted, in the Byzantine composition preserved most indelibly in the icon of the Virgin of Vladimir. With its intimate embrace, bringing Christ's face close to his Mother's mouth, it does evoke a deeply erotic tenderness suggestive of the Song of Songs. However, this association has not, to my knowledge, been made with either the icon of the Virgin of Vladimir or any of its kindred images in Byzantium. The poignancy of Mary's sallow, brooding face, set so closely beside the succulent physicality of her son's, has invited reflections instead on the depth of Mary's maternal love and pain.<sup>101</sup> The relation of Mary's imagery to the Song of Songs in Byzantium has never been explicitly explored;<sup>102</sup> if it

99 Hufgard, "Inspirational and Iconographic Source," 76.

100 Cames, "Parfums et diadème," 242–44.

101 See, esp., the section on "The Embrace" in H. Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," *DOP* 31 (1977): 123–74, at 160–66. Tsironis ("Lament of the Virgin Mary," 260–71) discusses the image of the Virgin of Tenderness with eloquence, referring often to Mary as the "bride unwed" and bride of Christ, but the Song of Songs figures in neither her text nor the sermons that she cites.

102 Though see K. Linardou, "The Couch of Solomon, a Monk, a Byzantine Lady, and the Song of Songs," in *The Church and Mary. Papers Read at the 2001 Summer Meeting and the 2002 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. R. N. Swanson, Studies in Church History 39 (Suffolk, 2004), 73–85; S. Der Nersessian, "Le lit

were, new dimensions would surely open. The Mary of the Sinai icon with the prophets (fig. 15), for instance, is aligned axially between Joseph and the triumphant Christ as “King of Glory,” creating an overt parallel between her earthly and her heavenly spouse, and inviting her interpretation as the Song of Songs’ bride.<sup>103</sup> Her imposing scale and powerful psychological and physical engagement with her child, however, leave no question but that her primary relation to him is as a parent. Mary was consistently identified in Byzantium as the “bride unwed” of the Godhead, but only rarely was this understood to mean the son, rather than the father.<sup>104</sup> Though patristic sermons, especially those of John of Damascus, had placed the summons of the Song of Songs’ bridegroom in the mouth of Christ at Mary’s Assumption, they had not given Mary the words of the bride,<sup>105</sup> and it was not until the fourteenth century that she was linked theologically in Byzantium with the loving bride of the poem.<sup>106</sup> No tradition of devotional imagery had evolved around a spousal relation of mother and son. Thus, it is far from clear that the mouth-to-mouth intimacy of the Virgin of Vladimir was ever associated in Byzantium with the ardent “sister” and “spouse” of the Song of Songs’ beloved. The centrality of the Byzantine Mary’s motherhood had not been challenged by the spousal affection of the “bride of Christ” as conjured by the Song of Songs.<sup>107</sup> To the extent that the Mary of the Citeaux painter’s Jesse Tree initial warrants the association with

the bride of the Song of Songs that scholars have given it, this is not an interpretation likely to have come with her posture from Byzantium.

The other question relates to the West. Bernard, too, had deftly skirted the idea of Mary as the bride of the Song of Songs.<sup>108</sup> As noted clearly by Hufgard, his second sermon on the Song of Songs actually locates the loving kiss very differently:

I must ask you to try to give your whole attention here. The mouth that kisses signifies the Word who assumes human nature; the nature assumed receives the kiss; the kiss however, that takes its being from both the giver and the receiver, is a person that is formed by both, none other than “the one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 2:5).<sup>109</sup>

And again at the end:

I must end this sermon. But let me sum up briefly the points we have raised. It would seem that this holy kiss was of necessity bestowed on the world for two reasons. Without it the faith of those who wavered would not have been strengthened, nor the desires of the fervent appeased. Moreover, this kiss is not other than the Mediator between God and man, himself a man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5), who with the Father and Holy Spirit lives and reigns as God for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>110</sup>

The erotic kernel of the sermon is thus identified not with the bride of the poem but with “a man, Jesus Christ.” That the proposed bond of the Citeaux initial’s Mary with the bride of the Song of Songs could have arisen from Bernard’s words is thus far from assured. Nonetheless, it is unquestionable that the bride had

de Salomon,” *ZRVI* 8: *Mélanges Georges Ostrogorsky*, 2 vols. (1965), 1:77–82.

103 Papamastorakis (n. 88 above) brings out the icon’s emphasis on married couples—Adam and Eve, Anna and Joachim, Mary and Joseph—but does not go on to couple Mary and the triumphant Christ.

104 J. H. Ledit, *Marie dans la Liturgie de Byzance*, *Théologie historique* 39 (Paris, 1976), 188–91.

105 See nn. 48 and 49 above.

106 Linardou, “Couch of Solomon,” 77.

107 There was certainly considerable latitude in Byzantine conceptions of Mary’s conjugal relation to God, as seen in contrasting Romanos the Melode’s presentation of the Annunciation as read by T. Arentzen, *The Virgin in Song: Mary and the Poetry of Romanos the Melode* (Philadelphia, 2017), 46–86, with that of the Patriarch Photios in his sermon on the Nativity of the Virgin as quoted by Tsironis, “Lament of the Virgin Mary,” 217, from C. Mango, trans., *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*, DOS 3 (Cambridge, MA, 1958), 174: “Just as the first man had been formed of virgin earth, so the re-creation, too, should be carried out through

a virgin womb, and that no transitory pleasure, even lawful, should be as much as imagined in the Creator’s birth.”

108 Fulton (*From Judgment to Passion*, 303–8), concluding that for Bernard, Mary is “the mediator who makes speech between the beloved and his bride possible, who gives flesh and, therefore, form to God, but she is not herself the Bride Who Speaks.”

109 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. K. Walsh, in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 2.1, Cistercian Fathers Series 4 (Spencer, MA, 1971), 9–10.

110 *Ibid.*, 15.





Fig. 19.  
Lyon, Bibliothèque  
municipale, ms. 410,  
fol. 207v, opening  
initial to Song of  
Songs. Courtesy of  
the Bibliothèque  
municipale.

already long been linked to Mary in the West. It was a link located in liturgy reaching back to Carolingian times, as seen in Paschasius Radbertus's *Cogitis me*, and it lay ready for appropriation in the expanding Marian devotion. Moreover, regardless of how the affectionate posture seen here might have been viewed in Byzantium, it was unquestionably understood by at least some Western viewers in terms of the kiss of the Song of Songs. Though still tentative in the miniature from Citeaux, this bond is clear and overt when it appears in the somewhat later Lyon, Bibliothèque municipale, ms. 410, fol. 207v, for it adorns the very words of the Song of Songs: *Osculetur me . . . Let him*

*kiss me with the kiss of his mouth* (fig. 19).<sup>111</sup> Here Mary seems to speak the passionate words of the Song of Songs' bride. This goes well beyond Bernard. Bernard had written incandescently on the Song of Songs, and spoken *about* Mary receiving the kisses of Christ. But when the words were actually spoken in his sermons, they were placed in the mouth either of the Church or the seeking soul. Here, they belong to Mary. She proclaims herself both lovable and desirous of love. The miniature is no happenstance. Exactly the same thing had been done in an immensely influential

111 J. Porcher, *L'enluminure française* (Paris, 1959), pl. XXXVI.

text composed in England by a scholar-monk named Honorius Augustodunensis in about 1100.<sup>112</sup> This text, the *Sigillum Sanctae Mariae*—the Seal of St. Mary—unfolds the Song of Songs’ passionate words as a drama enacted by Mary at the time of her Assumption. It is the voice of her love, as she says in the Song of Songs, a love “stronger than death.”

We tend to read the Mary of the Lyon miniature—and the image does not contradict it—in the view of the thirteenth century, when her love as the “bride of Christ” was interpreted in terms of her extravagant and abject compassion with the suffering Christ. This would certainly come. Already in the late eleventh century the Song of Songs had seen ascendant appeal as a matrix for ascetic devotion, often in texts sent to women;<sup>113</sup> in fact, Paschasius himself, following the lead of his patristic pseudonym, had closed his *Cogitis me* with a summons to Theodrada’s nuns to emulate the bride and look ahead to their own assumption.<sup>114</sup> An especially early and compelling example of eleventh-century meditational literature is the *Libellus* sent by John of Fécamp in the 1060s to the ex-empress Agnes of Poitou,<sup>115</sup> who is shown receiving her crown as the wife of Emperor Henry III from an authoritative Mary in the Speyer Gospels (fig. 9). John’s text begins with the opening words of the Song of Songs, returns often to its more passionate passages as he develops his themes of love and longing for union with Christ, and closes with a vision of ecstatic union drawn from the feast-day liturgy of St. Agnes. Both speaker and reader are urged to a tender and passionate anagogical arousal, seeking union with a loving, wounded, and wounding Christ. But the bride on whom this aspiration is modeled is extremely variable—the great exemplary monks whom John invokes;<sup>116</sup> John himself as Agnes’s devotional template; the Heavenly Jerusalem, whose fecund breasts

await the aspirant lover;<sup>117</sup> the martyr Agnes<sup>118</sup>—but never explicitly Mary, whose name appears only once, casually, in an invocation to all the saints.<sup>119</sup> Fervent as the evocation of the bride is in John’s and kindred texts, “who is she?” remains a deliberately open question, preserving the richly allegorical character of the Song of Songs and its utility as an allegorical template. What defines the bride is her ascent to Christ’s side. Just as the Assumption liturgy’s equation of the bride with Mary had existed alongside a number of other identifications, so the devotional meditations offered varied ways of identifying her. Only slowly would they settle upon Mary and her abject anguish under the cross.

The *Sigillum*, by contrast, offered a very different template. Its source was the liturgical feast of Mary’s Assumption, its passages of commentary woven not only around the Song of Songs but also around passages of Paschasius Radbertus’s *Cogitis me*.<sup>120</sup> Those words had been sung in liturgies for two centuries. In Rome, they had been ceremonially enacted each year in the procession of pope and people through the city to Santa Maria Maggiore, and in the eleventh century the Roman procession had been adopted in monastic liturgies in northern Europe, at Cluny, and in Cluny’s wake in other communities, including both Canterbury and Worcester,<sup>121</sup> likely sites where Honorius had composed his *Sigillum*.<sup>122</sup> Animated by the procession, the words sprang to life under Honorius’s pen, Mary and Christ playing out their love as he welcomes her to heaven as his bride. The *Sigillum*’s bride is not allegorical, she is historical—the one who *has been* assumed at death to union with Christ. Her union does not occur at the end of his text, as an open-ended aspiration *in spe*. It happens in the middle of the Song of Songs, in the fourth of its eight sections. It occurs as a fact, and it has consequences—for the Church on earth, for the conversion of the Jews, and for the end of time. The *Sigillum* closes

112 Honorius Augustodunensis, *The Seal of Blessed Mary*, trans. A. Carr, Peregrina Translations Series 18 (Toronto, 1991).

113 See most recently S. McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2010), 25–85.

114 Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief*, 25.

115 *Meditations of Saint Augustine*, intro. J.-C. Girard, trans. M. J. O’Connell, ed. J. E. Rotelle (Villanova, PA, 1993), chaps. 12–25, 27, 35–37; McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 62–80; and Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 155–70.

116 *Meditations of Saint Augustine*, 106.

117 *Ibid.*, 72.

118 *Ibid.*, 115.

119 *Ibid.*, 103.

120 Fulton, “Quae est ista,” 62–76; eadem, “Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis, and the Historical Sense of the *Song of Songs*,” *Viator* 52 (1996): 85–116, at 85–87; and Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 151, 158.

121 Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 269–71, which also includes her vivid reconstruction of the ceremony at Cluny.

122 V. J. Flint, “The Commentaries of Honorius Augustodunensis on the *Song of Songs*,” *RBén* 84 (1974): 196–221, at 202–3.



in conversation, as Christ asks his bride what she wants, and she requests in phrases from the Song of Songs that he will in “judgment, separate the damned from the elect.” This, Honorius concludes, “is what is to be said concerning the Canticle.”<sup>123</sup> His bride is Mary, her love seals the bond of humankind and its fate to God, the critical juncture in the story is her Assumption, and it has direct implications for how all other humans will meet their final judgment. The bride of the Song of Songs and Mary of the Assumption are joined; she is Christ’s queen, and she does not grieve.<sup>124</sup>

Saint Anselm’s passionate devotion to an all-powerful Mary, “by [whom] the elements are renewed, hell is redeemed, demons are trampled down and men are saved,”<sup>125</sup> certainly helped give Honorius’s work life; so, too, did the surging affirmation, especially in England, that the Dormition was really the Assumption, that Mary’s body as well as her soul had been assumed at her death.<sup>126</sup> With this, there was real skin in the game. Newly clothed in the perfection of eternity, she was truly her son’s beloved in heaven. Perhaps even more important to the *Sigillum*’s success was the rising swell of Marian devotion registered in the host of pilgrimage miracles and the ensuing flood of Marian miracle collections, for these presumed a Mary assumed: authoritative, empowered, and proximate at Christ’s right hand.

The impact of the *Sigillum* was felt almost at once, as a new kind of Marian image emerged in the art of the medieval West to express it. Known as the Coronation of the Virgin, it displays Mary enthroned as the radiant consort of her enthroned and attentive son.<sup>127</sup> It survives for the first time in the mosaicked apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome, begun in about 1140

(fig. 20).<sup>128</sup> Here Christ and the crowned Mary appear together on a shared throne. They are speaking to each other. He says, “Come, my chosen one, and I will place my throne in you,” and she responds, *His left hand is under my head and his right hand embraces me* (Song 8:3). Mary’s words were well and widely known from both the Song of Songs and the liturgy, and concretized in Christ’s gesture. His words echo an antiphon from the Assumption feast. This composition, “born” as Philippe Verdier says, “with the springtime of Gothic art,”<sup>129</sup> feels very new and transalpine, but the liturgy it enacts had originated centuries earlier in Rome. That the image appeared there first honors the long history of the Assumption processions in that city. The depth of its legacy also reminds us that Mary, not just as mother but as the radiant and authoritative spouse of her son in heaven, had deep roots in European sensibility, heralded by Paschasius Radbertus and sensed already in the mutually aureoled couple who face each other in the Petershausen Sacramentary (fig. 11). Honorius’s *Sigillum* brought the spousal Mary to the fore, but it did not invent it.

Nonetheless, the composition at Santa Maria in Trastevere marks a perceptual threshold, as felt in the shade of unease that has eddied around the words assigned to Christ. Already very early, these were often transmitted as “I will place you upon my throne.”<sup>130</sup> As this resistance shows, the inscription as it appears contradicts the image it adorns. The mosaic clearly shows not Christ enthroned upon Mary, but Mary upon the throne of Christ. The antiphon had drawn no attention before it was singled out here, and it accords with formulas running back to the very roots of Marian poetic and liturgical terminology. “Hail, you who are the throne of the King; Hail, you who hold Him who holds all,” sings the first stanza of the Akathistos Hymn; “Today God who rests upon the spiritual thrones has made ready for Himself a holy throne upon earth,” proclaims the opening of the Great Vespers for the feast of Mary’s birth in the liturgy of the Church

123 Honorius Augustodunensis, *Seal of Blessed Mary*, 85.

124 See Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 281: “Mary does not, in her guise as a courtly lady, grieve.”

125 Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, trans. B. Ward, foreword R. W. Southern (London, 1973), 119–20.

126 Mayr-Harting, “Idea of the Assumption,” 103; P. Verdier, *Le couronnement de la Vierge: Les origines et les premiers développements d’un thème iconographique* (Montreal, 1980), 19–21.

127 M.-L. Thérel, *Le triomphe de la Vierge-Église: A l’origine du décor du portail occidental de Notre-Dame de Senlis; Sources historiques, littéraires et iconographiques* (Paris, 1984); Verdier, *Le couronnement*.

128 Tronzo, “Apse Decoration”; E. Kitzinger, “A Virgin’s Face: Antiquarianism in Twelfth-Century Art,” *ArtB* 62 (1980): 6–19, at 8–12, 17–19.

129 Verdier, *Le couronnement*, 14.

130 Lavin, “Cimabue’s Life of Mary,” 27 and n. 108.



Fig. 20.  
Rome, Santa Maria in  
Trastevere, apse mosaic  
with Coronation of the  
Virgin. Photo courtesy of  
Scala / Art Resource, NY.



of Constantinople.<sup>131</sup> Such statements had already long assumed a fitting form in visual imagery as Mary bearing her child. The parity of the enthroned figures in Santa Maria in Trastevere functions differently. Mary is not Christ's throne; she shares it. If the mosaic shows Christ as Our Lord, it shows Mary as Our Lady.

In the wake of Santa Maria in Trastevere, the Coronation of the Virgin became one of Western Europe's most radiant scenes. It was still a little stiff

in Trastevere, and again a trifle later in the cathedral of Senlis in France. But at the brink of the thirteenth century at Chartres, its true spirit emerges (fig. 21). Chartres's Coronation was created just at the time of the Juggler's story, and its spirit is of grace and joy. Its Mary is not really a mother, or even, *pace* both Bernard and the Byzantines, a soul, but rather a queen, a consort, the bride in cloth of gold beautifully woven, crowned by the king's chosen son. A chivalric culture knew just how to relate to such a figure. She was a woman, therefore to be won, and a lady, therefore to be served. Bernard spoke of devoting himself to Mary as

131 *The Festal Menaion*, 454, as used in the Annunciation liturgy, 100, in that of the Birth of the Virgin.





Figure 21. Chartres, Cathedral of Notre Dame, north transept, tympanum with Coronation of the Virgin. Photo by Gerald L. Carr.

an itinerant knight devoted himself to his lady. Anselm had been even more ardent:

O beautiful to gaze upon,  
lovely to contemplate, delightful to love,  
whither do you go to evade the breadth of  
my heart?  
Lady, wait for the weakness of him who  
follows you;  
do not hide yourself,  
seeing the littleness of the soul that seeks you!  
Have mercy, Lady,  
upon the soul that pants after you with longing.<sup>132</sup>

In the wake of a Mary who declares herself both lovely and desirous of love, the images of her become just as gracious, just as queenly, just as much a lady. The many

132 Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 120.

books of personal prayer, above all psalters, offered a wide canvas for medieval painters to conjure such a figure, exalted and yet both fashionable and enchanting (fig. 22).<sup>133</sup> I think this is the Mary that the Juggler encountered, too. More importantly, it is he, the devotee without words, who most clearly reveals the distinctive kind of devotion that this new Mary demanded. She was Our Mother to the degree that she was also Our Lady, the vigilant and self-aware consort of the lord of all. It was not enough just to venerate, or to praise, or to bear one's tears and burdened heart to her. As Our Lady she was to be served, extravagantly, with the kind of service that one was best skilled and able to

133 N. Morgan, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles*, vol. 4, *Early Gothic Manuscripts*, pt. 2, 1250–1285, ed. J. J. G. Alexander (London, 1988), 157–60, no. 62: the Cuerdon Psalter of ca. 1270. The curatorial description and full bibliography are available at <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/description/141476>, consulted 3 August 2020.



Fig. 22.  
New York, Morgan  
Library and Museum,  
Ms. M 756, fol. 10v,  
Cuerdon Psalter, Virgin  
and Child with donor  
portraits. Courtesy of  
the Morgan Library  
and Museum.



offer as a person in the world. The Juggler was a little man with a ludicrous skill. He was her juggler, with only a ludic skill to offer. But like David and all Israel before the Ark in 2 Samuel 6:5 and Wisdom in Proverbs 8:30, who “played before the Lord,”<sup>134</sup> he served his

134 So in 2 Sam. 6:5 “David autem et omnis Israel ludebant coram Domino” (and David and all the Israelites played before the Lord), and Wisdom says in Prov. 8:30–31 “delectabar per singulos

dies ludens coram eo omni tempore ludens in orbe terrarium” (I was delighted every day, playing before him at all times; playing in the world). It is perhaps notable that the parallel with Wisdom cannot be made in the Greek tradition, for the Septuagint gives Prov. 8:30–31 as: “ἤμην παρ’ αὐτῷ ἀρμόζουσα. ἐγὼ ἤμην ἢ προσέχαιρε, καθ’ ἡμέραν δὲ εὐφραίνόμην ἐν προσώπῳ αὐτοῦ ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ. ὅτε ἐνευφραίνετο τὴν οἰκουμένην συντελέσας, καὶ ἐνευφραίνετο ἐν υἱοῖς ἀνθρώπων” (I was by him, suiting [myself to him], I was that wherein he took delight; and daily I rejoiced in his presence continually. For





Fig. 23. Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore, Jacopo Torriti, Coronation of the Virgin. Photo courtesy of Scala / Art Resource, NY.

lady with play as ardent and exposed as that of David, and was rewarded with her grace.<sup>135</sup>

Among the most beautiful of all Coronations of the Virgin adorns the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore, where this article opened (fig. 23).<sup>136</sup> The image is exuberantly youthful and joyous. Close attention, though, reveals the scene of the Dormition immediately below it. It takes its place in a sequence that ascends from

he rejoiced when he had completed the world, and rejoiced among the children of men).

135 See the very vivid exegesis of the Juggler's "play" in Fulton Brown, *Mary and the Art of Prayer*, 371–79.

136 H. Kessler and J. Zacharias, *Rome 1300, On the Path of the Pilgrim* (New Haven and London, 2000), 123–25.

Mary's death as mother to her triumph as queen.<sup>137</sup> Its presence here points back to the Byzantine beginnings of our text. The Dormition, distilled from the eerie, early, extracanonical accounts of Mary's demise, had been a profound invention of the early Byzantine East. At its core lay a transcendent love story, as Christ took into his immortality the human woman who had taken his Godhead into her body. That story had magnified Mary, giving her a strength exceeding sorrow and sin, and even death. Its impact was shared throughout Christendom, and the power it conferred upon Mary underlay her power to elevate the Juggler, too. Already the very earliest known account of the Dormition had

137 As emphasized by Tronzo, "Apse Decoration," 185–86.

aligned Mary with the Ark of the Covenant, the association made again in the Juggler's story,<sup>138</sup> and the Greek fathers had also called upon the dance of David to enhance the celebrative force of this analogy. In the words of John of Damascus on the Dormition: "Today, the holy, living ark of the living God, the one who carried her own maker within herself, comes to her rest in the temple of the Lord not made by hands. David—her ancestor and God's—leaps for joy; the angels join in the dance, the archangels applaud."<sup>139</sup> For John, however, David's leaping added nobility and joy to the Ark's magnification; it was neither ludicrous nor humiliating. Similarly in the Byzantine miniature illustrated above, David's form is upright and confident, for all his dancer's flapping sleeves (fig. 2). Moreover, for John,

as earlier for Andrew of Crete, the force of the Ark as an analogy for Mary lay less in its beauty than in its character as a container. It contained the words and signs of God's covenant, as Mary had contained within herself her maker. This, too, is visible in the Byzantine miniature with its "pregnant" Ark. Byzantium's Mary remained always, simultaneously and paradoxically, the container—the mother—as well as the bride of God. That the two aspects became, as in the apse here, a sequence, was a development of the West. It was there that Mary was steeped in the romance—and eventually in the abjection—of spousal affection.

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138 See n. 30 above.

139 Second Homily on the Dormition in *On the Dormition of Mary*, 205.